

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS BRATISLAVA 000133

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA POLITICAL ROUNDUP FEBRUARY 1-6, 2004

[1](#)1. SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

OUTCRY OVER LINKING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND REFERENDUM

[1](#)2. (U) PRESIDENT SCHUSTER'S DECISION TO SCHEDULE THE REFERENDUM ON EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS THE SAME DAY AS THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION (APRIL 3) SPARKED IMMEDIATE CRITICISM. OPPONENTS SAID THE MOVE WAS AN UNCONSTITUTIONAL REELECTION CAMPAIGN PLOY TO SCHUSTER'S ADVANTAGE. PM DZURINDA TOLD MEDIA THAT LINKING THE TWO VOTES WAS "UNFAIR AND DISHONEST." THE RULING COALITION HAS VOWED TO TAKE THE MATTER TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT. (COMMENT: THE TACTIC OF REFERRING THE ISSUE TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT MIGHT BENEFIT THE COALITION BY DELAYING THE REFERENDUM BEYOND APRIL 3, AND THUS ENSURING LOW VOTER TURNOUT. HOWEVER, IT COULD ALSO BE USED AGAINST THE COALITION. THE RULING PARTIES WILL MEET FEBRUARY 9 TO WEIGH THEIR OPTIONS.)

HZDS VICE-CHAIR: REFERENDUM MOMENTUM SLOWING

[1](#)3. (SBU) POLOFFS MET WITH HZDS VICE-CHAIRMAN SERGEJ KOZLIK THE DAY AFTER SCHUSTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT. HE ESTIMATED ONLY 35 PERCENT OF VOTERS WOULD PARTICIPATE, SAYING THE NEGATIVE MOMENTUM CREATED BY PRICE INCREASES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR WOULD BE LOST BY APRIL. AS FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, KOZLIK PREDICTED THAT VLADIMIR MECIAR, WHO WAS PUSHED BY HZDS LEADERSHIP AND REGIONAL STRUCTURES AS WELL AS PERSONAL AMBITION TO RUN, WOULD MAKE IT TO THE SECOND ROUND. HE SAID POLLING NUMBERS FOR EDUARD KUKAN AND IVAN GASPAROVIC ARE INFLATED. KOZLIK CONFIRMED THAT HZDS PLANS MORE SYSTEMATIC AND VISIBLE OPPOSITION-POLITICS, SINCE SUPPORTERS HAVE CRITICIZED THE PARTY FOR SEEMING TOO CLOSE TO THE COALITION. HOWEVER, THERE IS NO HOPE FOR COMMON GROUND WITH FELLOW OPPOSITION PARTY SMER. HZDS SEES ITS ALLIES IN OTHER CENTER-RIGHT PARTIES, AND ITS MAJOR COMPETITORS IN THE NATIONALIST FACTIONS. KOZLIK WILL RUN THE HZDS CAMPAIGN FOR JUNE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS, IN WHICH HE EXPECTS TURNOUT TO BE VERY LOW.

BREAKAWAY PARTIES: EXPERIENCE OF PEOPLE'S UNION

[1](#)4. (SBU) POLOFFS ALSO MET WITH VOJTECH TKAC, CHAIR OF PEOPLE'S UNION (LU), WHICH SEPARATED FROM HZDS LAST YEAR. SUPPORT FOR LU IN POLLS HAS DECREASED TO BELOW ONE PERCENT SINCE THE SPLIT. NONETHELESS, TKAC SAID 40-80 NEW MEMBERS JOIN THE PARTY WEEKLY. HE EXPLAINED THAT LU HAS BEEN WORKING WITH JAN SLOTA'S SLOVAK NATIONALIST PARTY (SNS) FOR PRAGMATIC REASONS, NOT BECAUSE HE AGREES WITH NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY--BOTH LU AND SLOTA SUPPORT IVAN GASPAROVIC FOR PRESIDENT. TKAC SAID MECIAR IS NOT A DEMOCRAT AND IS UNABLE TO MANAGE THE HZDS MPS. IN ADDITION TO HIS PERSONAL AMBITION, MECIAR HOPES TO RAISE HZDS' PROFILE BY GETTING TO THE SECOND ROUND IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. BOTH TKAC AND KOZLIK PREDICTED THAT THE REFERENDUM ON EARLY ELECTIONS WOULD FAIL AND THAT THE DZURINDA GOVERNMENT WOULD PERSEVERE THROUGH THE END OF ITS FOUR-YEAR TERM.

WOMEN IN POLITICS...NOT

[1](#)5. (SBU) MP JOSEF HERIBAN (ANO) HAS PROPOSED MANDATING THAT EVERY THIRD CANDIDATE ON A PARTY LIST BE A WOMAN. AT LUNCH HOSTED BY THE DCM, HERIBAN AND OTHER LEADERS DESCRIBED GAINS WOMEN HAVE MADE IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, NGO'S, AND THE ARTS, BUT SAID THEY LAGGED BEHIND IN PUBLIC OFFICE. MP EVA CERNA (ANO) NOTED THE LACK OF A "WOMEN'S CAUCUS" IN PARLIAMENT, SINCE FEMALE MP'S FOLLOWED INSTRUCTIONS RATHER THAN THEIR CONSCIENCES. SHE ADDED THE MEDIA WAS OFTEN MORE INTERESTED IN HER HAIRSTYLE THAN HER OPINIONS. THERE ARE LARGE NUMBERS OF WOMEN AT LOWER LEVELS IN MINISTRIES, BUT SINCE DECISIONS ARE MADE FROM THE TOP DOWN, THEY DO NOT ACTUALLY INFLUENCE POLICY. SEVERAL PROFESSIONAL WOMEN HAVE COMMENTED TO POLOFF THAT SLOVAKIA'S GENEROUS MATERNITY BENEFITS (UP TO THREE YEARS OF GOVERNMENT-SUBSIDIZED LEAVE) MAKE WOMEN UNCOMPETITIVE ON THE LABOR MARKET, AS EMPLOYERS ARE OPENLY UNWILLING TO HIRE WOMEN OF CHILD-BEARING AGE.

WEISER

NNNN